

Sūrah Qāriah

Central Theme

The basic teaching of this *sūrah* is that the Day of Judgement about which man is being forewarned is destined to come. No one has any prior knowledge about its arrival, which will be as sudden as an unexpected rap at the door. One should always remain apprehensive about it and be wise enough to be always in a position to anticipate its arrival. On that day, people will emerge from their graves as scattered moths appear in the rainy season; everyone will be too busy in contemplating the fate which awaits him than to think about his family. No one will be in a position to help anyone else. The tremendous convulsion will render the mountains into tufts of carded wool let alone small fortifications or entrenchments. On that day, man will only benefit from his good deeds. God will set up the Balance of Justice in which all of man's deeds will be weighed. If the good deeds outweigh the evil ones, he will dwell in eternal bliss and if the evil deeds tilt the scales, the scorching pit of Hell will be his eternal abode.

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
الْقَارِعَةُ (١) مَا الْقَارِعَةُ (٢) وَمَا أَذْرَاكَ مَا الْقَارِعَةُ (٣) يَوْمَ يَكُونُ النَّاسُ كَالْفَرَاشِ
الْمَبْثُوثِ (٤) وَتَكُونُ الْجِبَالُ كَالْعِهْنِ الْمَنْفُوشِ (٥) فَأَمَّا مَنْ ثَقُلَتْ مَوَازِينُهُ (٦) فَهُوَ فِي
عَيْشَةٍ رَاضِيَةٍ (٧) وَأَمَّا مَنْ خَفَّتْ مَوَازِينُهُ (٨) فَأُمُّهُ هَاوِيَةٌ (٩) وَمَا أَذْرَاكَ مَا هِيَ (١٠)
نَارٌ حَامِيَةٌ (١١)

The Pounding one!

What is the Pounding one!?

And what do you imagine what the Pounding one is? (1-3)

On that day, people will be like scattered moths and mountains like tufts of carded wool. (4-5)

Then whose scales are heavy shall dwell in bliss and whose scales are light, the abyss shall be their abode. And what do you imagine what that is!? Raging Fire!! (6-11)

Explanation

¹ الْقَارِعَةُ (١)

Among other names, this is one of the names of the Day of Judgement. It means “the pounding one” or the “the rapping one”. The Arabic phrase قَرَعَ الْبَابَ, means “he pounded or rapped at the door”. This name indicates a special feature of the Day of Judgement: it will come as abruptly and as suddenly as an unexpected bang at the front door of a house at night which strikes panic among the dwellers inside. Like a bolt from the blue it will alight and catch everyone unaware. It will create a tremendous cataclysm in this universe and everything will be annihilated. Hidden in this name also is a warning that since no one has any foreknowledge about the time of its arrival and since it will be the biggest upheaval in the universe, it is in the well being of everyone to always remain fearful of it. The particular style adopted here has a ring of an alarm about it in order to caution everyone to be on their vigil and anticipate the arrival of this disaster. It can be said that the immense turbulence which will be created at the advent of that Day is somewhat being created before its arrival by the very clamour of its name.

² مَا الْقَارِعَةُ (٢)

This question serves to magnify the severity of the alarm, warning those who regard the Day of Judgement as an ordinary affair and have become indifferent to its implications. It cautions and urges them to seriously think about something which is bound to happen and to prepare themselves to negotiate its aftermath.

³ وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا الْقَارِعَةُ (٣)

This special Qur’ānic style, often used elsewhere, is meant to lament and deplore the foolishness of the addressees about such a significant event. It is in the form of an inquiry about their estimation of the severity of a calamity which will suddenly waylay them. It urges them to reflect on the dreadful fate of those who are ridiculing it, even after being warned about it time and again.

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1. The Pounding one!
 2. What is the Pounding one!?
 3. What do you imagine what the pounding one is!?
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يَوْمَ يَكُونُ النَّاسُ كَالْفَرَاشِ الْمَبْثُوثِ (٤)⁴

This is a graphic description of the situation which will arise on that day, when people will emerge from their graves like scattered moths. Everyone will stand alone to reckon with the results of his deeds. No one will have his family or clan about him nor any of his tribesmen or comrades to defend him. Even other deities he associated with God and other intercessors on whom he was depending upon will not be present to lessen his burdens. The Qur'an explicitly says:

يَوْمَئِذٍ يَصْدُرُ النَّاسُ أَشْتَاتًا لِّيُرَوْا أَعْمَالَهُمْ (٦:٩٩)

On that day, men will emerge from their graves alone so that their deeds can be shown to them. (99:6)

فَإِذَا نُفِخَ فِي الصُّورِ فَلَا أَنْسَابَ بَيْنَهُمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ وَلَا يَتَسَاءَلُونَ فَمَنْ ثَقُلَتْ مَوَازِينُهُ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ وَمَنْ خَفَّتْ مَوَازِينُهُ فَأُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ خَسِرُوا أَنفُسَهُمْ فِي جَهَنَّمَ خَالِدُونَ (٢٣:١٠١-١٠٣)

So when the trumpet is sounded, the blood relations between them will be no more on that day, nor will they be able to ask for each other's help. And only those whose scales of good deeds are heavy shall attain salvation and whose scales are light shall be the ones who have incurred a loss and shall forever abide in Hell. (23:101-103)

وَلَا يَسْأَلُ حَمِيمٌ حَمِيمًا يُبْصَرُونَ يَوْمَ الْمُجْرِمِ لَوْ يَفْتَدِي مِنْ عَذَابِ يَوْمِئِذٍ بِبَنِيهِ وَصَاحِبَتِهِ وَأَخِيهِ وَفَصِيلَتِهِ الَّتِي تُؤْوِيهِ وَمَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا ثُمَّ يُنْجِيهِ (٧٠:١٠-١٤)

On that day, no friend will inquire about his friend though they will be shown to each other. The sinner will wish to give away his children, his wife, his brother and his kinsfolk who gave him shelter, and all the people of the earth, as ransom if this could deliver him. (70:10-14)

وَتَكُونُ الْجِبَالُ كَالْعِهْنِ الْمَنْفُوشِ (٥)⁵

This verse means that on that day like tribal and family support and backing, the refuge and shelter provided by buildings, forts, citadels and other similar structures will be no more. Mountains will be rendered into

4. On that Day, people will be like scattered moths.

5. And the mountains will be like tufts of carded wool.

tufts of carded wool. This simile vividly portrays the fact that just as in the case of carded wool each fibre is completely set asunder, so shall be each particle of a mountain. The Arabic word **عَهْنٌ** is used for that wool which after having being carded and given colour has become ready for weaving.

Mountains are specially mentioned here because at that time those who were denying the Day of Reckoning regarded them as eternally indestructible. They used to mockingly ask the Prophet (sws) whether such huge structures would be destroyed on that day. This question has been quoted elsewhere in the *Qur'ān* and has been answered here in this verse.

فَأَمَّا مَنْ ثَقُلَتْ مَوَازِينُهُ (٦) فَهُوَ فِي عِيشَةٍ رَاضِيَةٍ (٧)⁶

The only things considered worthwhile on that day will be a man's good deeds. Only those whose good deeds outnumber their evil ones will attain salvation and all others will be doomed forever. A special Balance of Justice meant only to weigh the deeds of men, will be erected on that day, as mentioned in the *Qur'ān*:

وَنَضَعُ الْمَوَازِينَ الْقِسْطَ لِيَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ (٤٧:٢١)

And for the Day of Judgement, We will set up a special Balance of Justice (21:47)

A special characteristic of this Balance as mentioned in *Sūrah `Arāf* is that only truth (good deeds) will be able to tilt it. Evil (bad deeds) will have no weight in its scales:

وَالْوَزْنُ يَوْمَئِذٍ الْحَقُّ فَمَنْ ثَقُلَتْ مَوَازِينُهُ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ وَمَنْ خَفَّتْ مَوَازِينُهُ فَأُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ خَسِرُوا أَنفُسَهُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا بِآيَاتِنَا يَظْلِمُونَ (٧:٨-٩)

On that day, the truth only will have weight. So, those whose scales are heavy shall attain salvation, and those whose scales are light shall be the ones who have incurred a loss because they wronged their souls by denying Our revelations. (7:8-9)

The relative singular pronoun **مَنْ** as used in the verse above denotes plurality.

By saying that such people shall dwell in bliss is meant that not only will they be granted whatever they wish for but also what they cannot

6. Then whose scales are heavy shall dwell in bliss.

even imagine.

وَأَمَّا مَنْ خَفَّتْ مَوَازِينُهُ (٨) فَأُمُّهُ هَاوِيَةٌ (٩) وَمَا أَذْرَاكَ مَا هِيَ (١٠) نَارٌ حَامِيَةٌ (١١)⁷

This is a description of the fate of those whose evil deeds have no weight in the Balance of Justice. Whatever good deeds they may have brought with them will be rendered useless due to their ill-intentions and heretical beliefs. The scorching pit of Hell will be their eternal abode.

The Arabic word *أُمُّ* means “mother” but here it very aptly denotes a resort or a dwelling.

The ◦ at the end of the word *مَا هِيَ* is to maintain the rhyme of the verses by taking into consideration the conventional pause at the end of a verse.

7. And those whose scales are light, the abyss shall be their abode. And what do you imagine what that is!? Raging Fire!!